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Good morning Chairman Henry and members of the Joint Health and Human Services Subcommittee. My name is Tim Crowe and I am the father of two young boys named Caden and Cale and the husband of a loving and supportive wife Michelle. My purpose today is to discuss with you the impacts and challenges of raising a mentally and physically handicapped child in Montana. My youngest son Cale is by all measures a true success story. We can attribute some of that success to his personal courage, his steadfast determination and perhaps his complete ignorance to his many disabilities. However, the largest part of his success can be directly attributable to the assistance he received through the Part C Early Intervention program. I can say without a doubt, he would still be struggling to learn to walk and talk had he not received the intensive occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech therapy this program provided him. A few weeks ago he came home from his first grade class at Warren elementary with a book in his backpack. For the first time, the

book he was carrying was not meant for me to read to him for his enjoyment; it was for him to read to me for my enjoyment. Just last Sunday, I spent perhaps the happiest 2 hours of my life as Cale showed me the shortest and fastest way down the ski hill. These are the mile stones every parent treasures, it just that parents of disabled children sometimes never get to see these accomplishments. The medical professionals in this room can testify far better than I, and in greater detail, the criticality of ensuring these services are available for children under 3. But what a father can testify to is the overwhelming joy and pride of seeing his son grow and develop life skills which will afford him the opportunity to become a functional member of our community.

Raising a child with disabilities places our family in the minority of those families throughout Montana. My family's minority status increases when you consider that we are blessed with the ability to obtain and maintain health

insurance. It is no secret that many families in our state go without health insurance and tragically many of those families have disabled children in their homes and can't afford the health care they need. I simply can't imagine the level of pain, frustration, and hopelessness a parent must feel when they are unable to provide their child with the medical help they require. Even with medical insurance our children face other obstacles. We simply don't have enough skilled medical professionals to service the growing needs of our state's disabled children. Our hospitals and clinics still maintain waiting lists for children who need to see occupational, physical and speech therapists. And just last month the only pediatric neurologist in our state retired. I realize that when we make a choice to live in Montana we give up some of the opportunities available in larger metropolitan areas, but we should not have to sacrifice the health and well being of our children.

The economic realities of our nation have found their way to Montana, and as members of our sixty-first legislature you are tasked to decide where our limited resources will make the greatest impact. The multitudes of options in front of you over the next four months are endless. Your ears and heart are being pulled in every direction as those of us attempt to persuade you to validate our needs with the states resources. I am no different in my effort to convince you to invest in our children's future. You hold what is perhaps some of these kids last hope for help. If you fail to find a way to fund these programs during your brief stay here in Helena the result equates to countless children forgoing their opportunity to improve their lives and abilities. Our state can't afford a lot of things right now, we may not be able to afford the budget lines we are here to talk about today, but can we really afford to allow our children to go without the medical help they require? Can we afford to postpone addressing their disabilities until they are young adults and then try to fund their needs? Can

we afford to continue underfunding the wages of the dedicated professionals who help our states disabled children until they move on to jobs that can pay them a wage commensurate to their skills? We know what the costs are to help these kids now, I am not sure any of us can imagine what the price tag will be if we choose to wait.

I ask that you take a moment before you cast your individual vote, to consider how your life would differ if your son or daughter, grandchild, niece or nephew suffered from a physical or mental disability. How would your daily life be affected? Would you be able to provide the health care they require? Would you be able to care for them within your own home? Would you be able to deal with the daily public scrutiny created when you take your child out in public? Would you be able to take your spouse out to dinner or get away for a weekend together? Would you be able to keep your marriage intact as you struggle through the complex and

trying times a disabled child places on your family. The questions you could ask yourself are endless, the point is, should we be required to ask ourselves, "Where am I we going to get the assistance needed to help my child?" I appreciate the opportunity you have given me today to address your subcommittee. More importantly, on behalf of my family, I appreciate and thank you for your previous decisions to fund these life changing programs, and urge you to vote in favor of these latest budget requests.

Tim Crowe

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